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Naval Historical Center Oral Interview Summary Form

Interviewers:

Interviewer's Organization:

Gary Solis

Chief Oral History Unit

Marine Corps Historical Center

Interviewee:

Current Address:

SGT Keith Bohn

U.S. Park Police

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

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Anacostia

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Transcript of Interview:

Interviewee Information:

Sgt. Bohn is married and has been with the Park Police for approximately 18 years. He grew up in Wyoming, Pennsylvania, a graduate of Penn State University. He became a search and rescue ranger for the National Park Service working in Yosemite National Park before he came to the Park Police in January 1984. He knew very little about their air program until the famous Air Florida rescue on the Potomac River in January 1981. He received his pilot training in-house from the U.S. Park Police and flight school training from the Navy flight school; both Whiting Field and Pensacola. This was accomplished under a counter-narcotics support program under President Bush in the late '80s and early '90s. Seven trainees went to the military flight schools—three to the Navy and four to the Army. He maintains a paramedic license—involved with EMS since the 70's, first in Pennsylvania and then throughout the country. He had his EMT certification since high school and college. He initially became a SWAT medic with the U.S. Park Police before he got into aviation to become a flight medic. He flies one of the three helicopters—twin-engine, four-bladed Hueys—which the Park Police has in D.C. He has about 1500 hours of flight time, all with the government. He came into this unit in late 1989 and became a pilot in 1995.

Topics Discussed:

TAPE ONE-Side One

Q. On September 11^{th.} what was your shift and what were your duties?

A. I was on midnights. Right now I work steady midnights and I was coming off --

Q. I'm sorry. You mean you come on at midnight or you go off at midnight?

A. No, our midnights – actually, prior to September 11^{th,} was a 8 pm to 6 am. However, on that morning, I remember, I had shifted my midnight shift so I could do some administrative duties, which I was assigned to at that point. I worked, I believe, from 10 – 8 or even midnight to 10 a.m., was what I was working that morning doing some administrative things. I had some meetings in the morning with our command staff here. Then, I was walking out the door as the event occurred.

Q. What happened?

A. I was in civilian clothes. I was leaving the building. Actually, SGT BURCHELL had commented he had heard some sort of large explosion. I had received a phone call from a friend of mine who talked about -- she was driving through town and could see a large fire on the other side of town. She was actually on Southbound 295 and could see a large fire on the other side of town and wondered what had happened. Of course, we all knew about the World Trade Center events that had unfolded earlier. I don't think I, or anyone, was expecting more of the same in D.C., so, I was preparing to leave the building and was walking out when disaster struck. Then my commander, LT CHOLAK, advised me to suit up and get into one of the aircraft; that we're going to respond.

Q. You did that, of course?

A. Yes, yes. I immediately jumped into a flight suit and boots and geared up to go. Even from here we could see the smoke plume easily from the hanger. We're not that far away, just over a mile away. The initial phone call came in saying that they had an aircraft down at the end of the runway at National Airport. So, we launched Eagle One with SGT GALEY, SGT MARSH, and OFFICER DILLON immediately. They went off first, while myself and SGT BURCHELL prepared a crew to launch in Eagle Two. Those are the two 412 aircraft. Eagle One and Two. As fate would have it, we were having a large training event right out in front of the building here for the upcoming IMF, the International Money Fund demonstrations. So, we had horse mounted officers, motorcycle officers, ground troops all training together to handle the movement of large groups of people. When we do thing like that we have support from medical staff from the Department of Defense who are on sight. We quickly grabbed two of their medical personnel, Paramedic JASON KEPP and a Physicians Assistant KEITH KEITELL. We grabbed those two medics, myself, and SGT BURCHELL and then LT CHOLAK and the Assistant Commander SGT STASULLI and the six of us launched on Eagle Two.

Q. Six? So. that was you. SGT BURCHELL. JASON KEPP, KEITH KEITELL. LT CHOLAK and SGT STASULLI. All right.

A. The six of us launched after our mechanic. TOM GRIER, here on the sight, assisted us in getting our mass casualty kit into that aircraft.

Q. You were first on the scene?

A. To land on the scene, yes. Eagle One, with SGT GALEY, stayed airborne. We were talking air-to-air and he directed me into where to land on sight.

Q. At what point did you realize you weren't going to National?

A. Well, as soon as I got the aircraft up and running, my mechanic asked for 15 minutes of time to get the mass casualty kit properly installed and get everything ready and I said, "You have two. We got to go!" I immediately started -- I was the only in the aircraft with it running and I was talking with Eagle One and they told me, in disbelief, that the aircraft had, in fact, hit the Pentagon. So, I knew that. Not that an aircraft crashed into National Airport is not enough of an emergency, but certainly an aircraft into the Pentagon created a more heightened response. It tightened me up, I know. I quickly formed up our team and there was some concern over where we were going to go. In fact, [inaudible] and I said, "Yes, take six," because I thought we'd need them. I knew we'd need some ground support and we used them.

Q. You hadn't operated with CAPTAIN KEITELL before? They just happened to be —
A. Actually, I have because we do train with them quite extensively, so I know them very well and I had complete confidence in their medical abilities. They've worked in the aircraft with us before so it was a very good mix. I knew they'd be doing patient care though and I suspected there'd be a little bit of a, how should I say, a less-than-controlled scene when we arrived so that's why I wanted both the Commander and Assistant Commander with me for personnel, just to have some command and control of whatever we were going to take.

Q. So, you foresaw the possibility that you would need them on the ground to take care of things there.

A. Yes.

Q. So, you landed where?

A. Yes, I went in and Eagle One had already scouted out a landing zone for us. They had advised us to land in the cloverleaf of, what I believe is, Route 29 (Editors Note: it is Route 27) and something-Pike (Editors Note: Columbia Pike). I forget what it is over there, but it's basically on the west side of the Pentagon. On the impact side of the Pentagon, we landed in the grass area of the cloverleaf. We were the first ones to land and then we deployed our crew of six off the aircraft from there.

Q. And what happened?

A. It worked very well, actually, because SGT BURCHELL went with, I believe, JASON KEPP. They went together as a two-man team. LT CHOLAK took KEITH KEITELL as another two-man team and they went towards the patients. SGT STASULLI stayed with me and took up the position of rear guard on the aircraft.

Q. You were armed?

A. Yeah, I was armed. SGT STASULLI was armed. Actually, I, ironically, was not armed because I did not have my weapon with me because I went out of here without it. SGT STASULLI took the rear guard position and we kept the engines running as the other four went into the crowd to find out what was what. At that point, we had no information on number of patients. We didn't know what we were getting. SGT BURCHELL was the first one to get to what was the triage area and found that the initial reports that there were 11 patients to be flown. At that point, Eagle One, who I was still talking to air to air or air to ground in this case because I

was on the ground, I gave them the word and they started calling up other aircraft for the MEDIVAC mission.

Q. How long were you on the ground?

A. I don't know. I suspect maybe 10 minutes before I repositioned. Very quickly, SGT BURCHELL called me and said, "I want you to move closer." So, I called SGT STASULLI back into the aircraft and we launched. We had that scene ourselves. There was no one there to assist us, at that point. We picked up off the grass, circled that cloverleaf and popped over the light poles and landed on Northbound Route 29 (Editors Note: Route 27), right there by the Pentagon helipad. Right there is where we landed. It was a little bit closer. It meant that people didn't have to come over a number of jersey barricades to load us, or fences or guard rails. So, we landed there and took up the same positions again. SGT STASULLI took the rear guard and I just kept the aircraft running.

Q. Alright now, you say there were 11, initially, indicated as MEDIVACs. You eventually did MEDIVAC some people?

A. Yes. We flew out two. One of the things -- I think their concerns, and SGT BURCHELL could probably address this better because I wasn't there. I stayed with the aircraft. But, I think the 11 weren't ready to go, that they had 11 in some stages of preparation for transport, whether it being back-boarded or triaged or treated, but immediately we got about two patients coming towards us. In our aircraft configuration, we have our primary side, which is very easy to load, and a secondary side then becomes a stacking three unit, much like the old military Hughies [phonetic], three patients stacked. When we got the first patient, it was a very large patient so I

redirected that patient from the secondary side where they were trying to put -- I believe it was a female, to the other side. So, they put her on the other side. I could recognize she was pretty serious and, also, she was just a large patient so I said it's easier to work on a large patient from the other side. Can we put that patient there? We then got a second patient, who was also equally as large, who went on the bottom then level of the stacking litters. Well, the litters are on a hinge system and they have to fall down and because of the size of the patient one, number two wouldn't come down. So, we couldn't use number two position. We then were afforded the one remaining additional position three and patient three was coming forward to be loaded. That top stack has to be a smaller patient, and again another large patient, and I wasn't sure they were ready to go. So, we made the decision after loading these two very serious -- they were priority one patients -- that we should just go. We didn't have number three ready to go yet. They weren't there so we had two patients on board. We were just a few minutes away from the hospital center. We had other aircraft inbound, we knew. So, we launched with our two patients and I did leave most of my crew behind. I only launched off scene with two patients and two providers and myself, on board. SGT BURCHELL, who is an EMT, a former medic here, maintained one patient and JASON KEPP, the DoD paramedic, maintained the other patient. I just flew up to the hospital center to the burn unit.

Q. Which hospital center?

A. We went to the Washington Hospital Center, Med-Star; the Med-Star Burn Unit. Actually, they came in behind us, their aircraft, Med-Star One, to take the only other patient that I know of that was flown. Of the initial 11, I know of only three that went by air. It is ironic that Med-Star One came in to fly that third patient while I was doing the transport of the first two. That was

being flown by our former Commander, TED CHITTICK, who is the former commander of this unit, used to fly here with us, and now is retired from Park Police, and flies for them. So, it was someone we were very familiar with.

Q. Then you returned?

A. After delivering those two patients to the hospital, we were called back here to pick up a Secret Service Agent who wanted to be on board as part of our roll of doing Presidential security in the city.

Q. This is SOP?

A. Yeah. We cover, much like we will later today, Presidential movements, motorcades, arrivals and departures. So, we have a large support mission to the U.S. Secret Service. The events of the day were unfolding. They wanted an agent on board. Their radios are in our aircraft. They can do their aerial observation. They use us as the platform. So, we came here to get that agent before returning to the Pentagon. At that point, Eagle One had then gone on to doing some other things. I know it was flying fire chiefs and things like that, as we returned with the agent on board.

O. When you got back, what was your roll then?

A. We went back in and we were expecting to land for additional MEDIVAC responsibilities, but Eagle One had already landed because since they were relieved by the Metropolitan Police aircraft, they had been advised that there were no patients ready to go yet, that they didn't have any, so they were on the ground. We stayed airborne. The Secret Service had some requests for us to check things like: the White House perimeter, the downtown areas, the rooftops. There

were a lot of things coming up. All of a sudden, everything was just unbelievable -- to check bridges for abandoned cars which were believed to be packed with explosives. So, we were running from one report of things to another report. Actually, in the city nothing else, in essence, happened that day, but there were -- lots of fear was running rampant. We were chasing our tail and everyone else's all around town from Memorial Bridge, 14th Street Bridge, The White House, The Capital was involved in wanting some perimeter checks, doing all that. In addition then we had the added, I don't know how to describe it, but the added problem of this fourth aircraft theoretically en route back to D.C. The aircraft that crashed in Pennsylvania, we were getting reports on.

Q. So, all the time you were running around town, you were also wondering if you were going to have to be responding to yet another crash?

A. Yes. Actually, we were being directed to --

Q. By? Directed by?

A. The National Tower had been abandoned at this point. Eagle One had taken over in their responsibilities initially and then passed it to Condor One. So, they were handling airborne. National approach was still active. The radar umbrella for the region was still giving us some reports of the aircraft returning to the city. We were getting things such as 20 minutes out, 10 minutes out. Their response was we should get away from the Pentagon. There came a point where all aircraft were directed to seek safety and get away from the Pentagon.

Q. Was it crowed air space by now?

A. Not really. At that point we had probably, maybe four or five. We had the city police, our two aircraft; Med-Star was there by this point. Air-Care was there from Fairfax Hospital, who another ironic — one of my flight instructors from the Marines who taught me at Whiting Field when I was in the Navy for him, was flying that aircraft. PETE RUSSET was his name. So we were all tied together in a unique way. We had about four or five aircraft there at that point. I don't recall the military being there yet. The word came out to the air traffickers aircraft was en route. Actually about this time at about 500 feet around the Pentagon, I was passed by a fighter jet at about 500 feet going in the opposite direction. SGT BURCHELL was in the left seat of the aircraft. I was in the right. He said, "Don't come left. There's a jet coming right at us." We passed each other at about flight level, very close. He was heading at high speed northwesterly. I assume towards the area of Pennsylvania. There were aircraft that stayed in the D.C. area. He was on a mission to go somewhere at a high speed. There was a lot of conversation on these frequency — now with military aircraft, especially the fighters, and the civilian helicopters, both the police and private sector, of who was who because they were tracking us by radar and they wanted make sure they knew we were friendly versus foe. There was some of that going on.

When they told us to clear away from the Pentagon, during this time we knew the other plane was coming back and we knew there were fighters in the air. we were worried about being a hot target to seek something that's going to seek heat. We wanted to get low. So, we went across town at about 100 feet. We were very low and stayed low and that was -- SGT BURCHELL and I talked about it and said, "Let's be down by the buildings which are safer than being up with all these fighters, especially if somebody's going to try to shoot something down at this point." So, we actually looked for a big expansive open area. We found the circle at the west end of

Memorial Bridge to be a very desirable area, completely abandoned right going into Arlington Cemetery. We just landed there. We just chose to land because --

Q. Just to get out of that?

A. Just to get out of anything. We weren't going to be airborne for this critical time. The reports were coming: 20 minutes out... 10 minutes out... and next we got something like four minutes out.

Q. This was identified as a suspect aircraft?

A. This was, I think, the aircraft that was crashed in Pennsylvania.

Q. You don't have IFF?

A. No, no. We were doing it by verbal from now the, not the tower sight, but probably the underground radar control sight of National area, the National Tower. National approach is what it was. We landed and waited and during that timeframe we were still being called for patients. We had to now tell the fire department. who now was not hearing these air reports of the incoming aircraft, that we can't -- "No, we can't come there yet". Everybody pulled out of the Pentagon. Air-Care lifted and went west.

Q. Who did?

A. The Fairfax Hospital aircraft had lifted and gone west. I think our Eagle One was back here re-fueling at that time. Condor One went and started doing -- to get away from the Pentagon, he started going high and climbing. They said, "No, we don't want you high because there are jets

up there so stay low." So, they were redirected and went low. We all cleared away from the Pentagon for a timeframe until someone knew there was no threat. We never knew the aircraft crashed up there until much later. Then everything cleared and they said that there was some sort of feeling that the timeframe they were talking about, the 20, 10, 4 minutes had passed. We waited and waited. I'm not sure how long we were on the ground over there, probably 10-15 minutes I was on the ground running at Memorial Bridge. Then we launched and came back in to the Pentagon.

Upon arriving at the Pentagon, we had a number of aircraft there. The city police had landed on the scene. The Fairfax Hospital aircraft was there again. Med-Star was there. Fairfax Police was there. We landed and we were all waiting for patients. Unfortunately, there weren't many to be transported. Either people were unfortunately killed or --

Q. Taken out by ambulances?

A. There were some done by ambulances. I don't know what the total number of patients was from the Pentagon. I never actually heard that. I think it was either you were almost killed or you were fine. There was this fine line. There weren't a lot of walking wounded. I remember when we first landed on the scene, there was a hectic scene of people running out of the building, disrobing, getting off clothes that were involved in post fire scene and it was very hectic. When we came back in for those patients, there weren't a lot of patients being flown. I'm not sure if that was just through a triage set-up, "let's wait for the real serious ones to be flown," or if there just weren't a lot of patients. I never really heard those numbers from the scene. I mean the number of dead has always been known, but never the number injured that I've heard.

Q. That's how you ended your day?

A. No, we continued. After landing at the Pentagon and, again, deploying my little gang of many — at this point, I had four people on board. It was SGT BURCHELL, myself, JASON KEPP and a Secret Service Agent whose name I don't recall. We again deployed for patients and when they went back to triage there were no patients so they came back to us. We said, "Alright, well, let's go back to airborne for the Secret Service mission. Let's go check some sights. Let's check the downtown area. Let's make sure how things like road closures are being performed." There was a lockdown on the city almost. Yet, there's a big escape from the city going on. You're trying to prevent people from trying into come into town, but letting government employees get out of town. Traffic was just a mess, as always, in this town. So we did some airborne stuff on that. The Secret Service was concerned with the House. We did that before coming back here to re-fuel. Also, there became a timeframe when numerous military aircraft started coming into the Pentagon site. MEDIVAC aircraft from Ft. Belvoir were starting to arrive. I think some of the PAT aircraft and the general transport aircraft were starting to come in.

Q. PAT?

A. PAT. The Army calls them PAT. something Air Transport. Not Presidential because they don't do the President, but it's basically the aircraft that does Generals and the such, going in and out of the Pentagon. Much like the Air Force uses First Helicopters Squadron out of Andrews [Air Force Base]. HMX One, the Presidential aircraft were around. A lot of aircraft were trying to congregate on the Pentagon and it got to be a little bit crazy. People wanted to land and help, but there was very little to do, unfortunately.

We decided it was time to get out of town. We came back here and re-fueled and then we picked up some additional missions later in the day. One of them was a FBI mission for the event.

Q. That did not relate directly to the Pentagon?

A. Oh, it did relate directly to the Pentagon. Actually, we actually had to go downtown to pick up the agents in the Mall area and fly to the Dulles Airport to begin the investigation on that aircraft. They knew they could not get out of town to get there. The FBI's aircraft is not based in town. There is a number of them down at Quantico. It was much more rapid to just get us to scoop them up. We did that with Secret Service on board, picked up the FBI. Now at this point, the Nation had gone into a lockdown for aviation and it became very touchy for how you could get in and out of things. We went from controlling the airspace to now almost not being allowed into it anymore. We had to go through numerous phone calls to try and get hooked up to the right people about – and, obviously, calling anybody with the FAA that day, whether it be a tower operator, it was a difficult process. Busy signal was a common response. So, once we received approval, we launched and did this FBI mission to begin the investigation into the airliner that crashed into the Pentagon, which had come out of Dulles Airport.

O. Roughly what time of day or night was this?

A. Probably early afternoon. I'm thinking probably after 12, but before 1, somewhere in about there; maybe 1'ish.

Q. I should ask, your initial launch was roughly 10 a.m.?

A. 10-something, yeah, I'm thinking 10:30'ish, 10:40'ish which we were probably a little bit later, I'm thinking probably from the time of the event until the time we got off. When we got there things were still very hectic and out of control. Then by this point, we'd had the opportunity -- the Pentagon was actually -- there wasn't much we could do at that point. The patients that were in need of transport, we felt, were transported. We were doing some aerial observation. We were doing some command and control of the entire city and then we were involved in this FBI thing.

At this point, we assisted the FBI in starting the investigation into the crash at the Pentagon. They knew that aircraft came out of Dulles. They wanted to get some agents to the sight as quickly as possible. We picked some agents up out of FBI Headquarters using the National Mall as our landing zone, took them directly out to Dulles, and landed at the tower there to deploy them to start doing some things like securing people, witnesses, all sorts of people. A large crowd was at Dulles Airport because everything that got locked down was there. There were lots of people, from passengers to crews to ground handlers to all these people that run an airport; they were all there. Nothing was flying at this point and they didn't know when they were going to be.

Q. Did you get back to the Pentagon?

A. Not until much later. Getting back from Dulles was actually a very interesting process because Dulles didn't want to let me come back. At that point, Dulles, who wasn't really involved in the downtown scene, which we had been involved in this chaotic mismatch of private, and police, and military aircraft, Dulles was sort of just in a lock down mode. Actually,

the tankers had already taken up a pattern over Dulles. They were refueling fighters over Dulles airspace. When I got there, they told me I could not come back. It would probably be. somewhere in the neighborhood of, a two-hour delay. Well, obviously, I had Secret Service on board. We had a mission that was a little bit higher priority. We stayed running and tried to use every one of our channels to try and get clearance to get back. Amazingly, one of the unique missions was I went direct to the military observation aircraft flying high, probably some P3 Aircraft that were doing airspace control from high above the region controlling all these fighters and tankers, heard me calling for it and had heard me on the air already and had had enough exposure to. There's some of these little police helicopters down there doing their thing and he rescued me and saved my day. He said, "You're cleared. Come on. We just heard you go out there. We gave you a clearance." The rule then was you could have anything below 1000 feet. Don't go above 1000 because there's a bunch of fighters. I had seen that already at 500 feet so low was the way to go that day. So, he cleared me. I tried to tell Dulles Tower that I've been cleared by the military. They had all these different call signs the military uses. There was wild weasel and all these other things and not knowing who was who and couldn't tell by aircraft name who they were. But I told them I've been cleared by the military to come back into the city. They said, "Well that doesn't mean anything to us. You can't go yet." He goes, "Well wait, we just got a phone call. You're cleared." So somebody saved my day and got me back into the city. We came back and did a little bit more of the observation stuff.

One thing we do, also, is we down link what we see or video. All the live video was being down linked to most of the federal agencies in the city. They were able to see the Pentagon without being at the Pentagon.

Q. Were you the sole down link?

A. Initially, Eagle One started. Eagle One did most of the down links because we were doing the MEDIVAC mission and Eagle One did it. We did a little bit and, in addition, to down linking also capturing some video and things such as this. Actually, Eagle One did more of that. I don't know if we captured any at all.

Q. When did you finally land back here, the end of your day?

A. It was mid to late afternoon. I think it was more about 3'ish because I had that long delay out at Dulles; 3-something. My day became an extended day. I went from midnight shift to a day alert mission flying to another midnight. I did about 36 hours here straight. Not much of it airborne. I only flew two or three hours of air time that day, my aircraft. It was a lot of stress. obviously, not knowing what to do or wanting to help and not being able to do enough in many regards. We were lucky that we had -- because myself and SGT BURCHELL were off but were just here. SGT BURCHELL was assigned to training. I was coming off duty, but still here. We had the ability to launch two aircraft. which we typically don't. We were able to send as much of our asset over to help. Like I said, we did a lot of police work. We did a lot of command and control over the scene. We helped control the airspace. We transported patients. We provided medical personnel on the scene. I left my medics there for a long time, some of them, and helped control the scene a little bit. My intention was to leave my LT CHOLAK and SGT STASULLI on the scene not only for us, but for those other aircraft coming in so they would keep people off that field or off that loading zone. We went to having a staging area and a loading area, so you'd land at the staging area and then you'd hop into the loading area, take your patients and get out.

We had a nice plan set up for a very efficient mass casualty transport of patients, but to my knowledge, only three got flown. There just weren't those patients that either eligible to fly or there wasn't the necessity. I don't know if the local hospitals such as Arlington Hospital and National Orthopedic and those within reach over there cried wolf and said, "We can't take anymore." I don't know if that ever happened.

Q. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that might be of significance or of interest to someone who is going over the events of 9/11 or have we covered most of it? A. I think we have. I think it was incredible from, I'm sure the crew of Eagle One will confirm. like my crew felt that coming into that scene airborne was just amazingly incredible. When I landed on the scene, there was actually a particular slit into the side of the Pentagon, which is hard to believe that an aircraft made it, but it's that small of a slit. A large portion of the Pentagon is gone now, but when I got there, there was a slit that I couldn't believe an aircraft had actually penetrated. I could not see any aviation parts. I couldn't see an engine or a wing. There was just rubble, pieces, small pieces. Then while we were there, while I was on the ground, the building collapsed. The building actually caved in while we were there -- tremendous explosion. not explosion, but a boom and the sound and the vision of it because I was sitting there watching it, the building collapsing and burning and people fleeing, that image will stay forever with me. It is just amazing because what can you do? I'm thinking "Am I too close? Am I going to get taken out by the next explosion?" I'm actually yelling to SGT STASTULLI don't let these fleeing people get on board because they think -- people now are acting irrationally. They may think I'm there to save them. I'm there to save somebody. If they're running out, they're not the ones I'm there for. It was pretty unique.

Q. You were the first helicopter on the ground?

A. On the ground, yeah. We landed not having the knowledge of how many were ready to go.

We went in from Eagle One telling us where to go, directed me right into the scene. I didn't go in directly. I went over and did my typical high over it, low over it and landed versus later on we were coming straight in. It was a shocking vision! The radio traffic was just unbelievable.

National Towers being abandoned -- "You got it." They actually told, "Eagle One, Eagle Two.

you got it! There's no one else airborne. It's yours!" Like, basically, do what you want. Take over the city. Have at it! Then having that scene, I was just in shock, but, also, I was fortunate.

Q. This is what you were trained to do.

A. Yes, exactly! That's exactly right!

Transcribed by: K. Lacik

16 March 2002